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EDUCATION

Charter school for nurses moves ahead

By Chris Barrett
 PBN Staff Writer

PAWTUCKET – A charter school that would offer high school students advanced education in nursing has taken another step toward becoming a reality.

The R.I. Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education granted preliminary approval last week for the development of the Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College. The school, planned for Pawtucket, would offer a mix of core high school classes and college-level courses. Students could transfer the credits to college and stay beyond 12th grade.

Preliminary approval provides the school with the green light to start looking for a building and recruiting staff, R.I. Department of Education spokesman Elliot Krieger said. With those components in hand, the school is expected to return to the board around this time next year to seek final approval. The school could open as soon as September 2011.

However, as a charter school, Middle College would also need to secure financing from the General Assembly in the state budget. Alternatively, the state could adopt a statewide funding formula for education aid, which would eliminate the need for a special appropriation, Krieger said.

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Proponents of the school, including the Rhode Island Nurses Association and the Rhode Island Nurses Institute, say such a school could help alleviate crowding at the state's nursing schools and help fend off a looming shortage of nurses. The Hospital Association of Rhode Island projects that the state will need as many as 4,500 new nurses by 2014.

"We hope the Middle College will be a model across the country to help attract students into the nursing profession," Donna Policastro, executive director of the nurses association, said in a news release. "If Rhode Island truly is to become a leader in the medical-technology and health care industries, we need to better train our students to enter this innovative workforce."

The Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College has been spearheaded by Robert Pilkington, principal of Beacon Charter High School for the Arts in Woonsocket.

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